



To Wander or Stay Put?

The Hebrew Bible's ambiguous advice about leaving home

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Rabbi Graubart shows that the Hebrew Bible contains “two distinct attitudes...toward the ideal of wandering versus the urge to build a home and stay put.” Do you think that one of these attitudes is ultimately “correct”? What might be gained (or lost) by accepting them both as legitimate attitudes belonging to the same tradition?

2. The Hebrew Bible includes other examples of “doublets.” Graubart notes that one way to understand doublets is as a literary technique; another is to conclude that different authors reshaped the same narratives “in accordance with different agendas.” What is at stake in reading a sacred text as literature, or even as a historical artifact? Does an emphasis on the historical or the literary come at the cost of the transcendent, or does it enrich our understanding of it?

3. How might these same interpretive questions apply to other sacred texts? It might be worth reflecting on how the dynamics Graubart describes ramify through the Christian Bible (for example, in the four Gospels).

4. Shaul Magid, Graubart notes, has begun exploring a diasporic account of Judaism and even put forward a “pro-exile argument.” Does Graubart’s framework help us to understand and/or contextualize Magid’s argument? How does Graubart ultimately respond to Magid?

5. What does Graubart think we should do when it comes to the relation of Jews to Palestinians and to the land between the river and the sea? Is this an argument for compromise, discernment, paradox, or something else entirely?

6. Another word for staying put is “rootedness.” How is rootedness defined in the essay? How should we think about rootedness in light of Israel’s actions in Gaza? Does rootedness come at the cost of crimes against civilians in Gaza, and is it necessarily in conflict with other peoples’ claims for “staying put”? How might we rethink rootedness?

7. Graubart frames the question of wandering or staying put as a lose-lose situation: “Clinging to space closes off any hope for peace, while exile exposes the Jews to the dangers of the Diaspora.” Do you agree with this framing? Should we read this situation as a moral tragedy? Or does this framing miss something? How else might this conflict and/or the question of wandering be framed?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Andrew J. Bacevich, “The Israel-Gaza War Will Fail,” December 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/israel-gaza-airstrikes-bacevich-idf-netanyahu>

William Pfaff, “A Serious Question,” December 2012: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/serious-question>

Marilynne Robinson, “Forgiveness in Genesis,” March 2024: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/forgiveness-genesis-marilynne-robinson>

Thomas Banchoff, “Abrahamic Dialogue in the Shadow of War,” February 2024:
<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/interfaith-dialogue-israel-hamas-francis-abraham-al-azhar>

Regina Munch, “Birth Doesn’t Wait,” March 2024: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/new-mothers-gaza>